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MN020501A. Surgeon General: Navy Medicine Has Never Been Stronger

Nearly five months have passed since the heinous acts of September 11th. Today, armed Guardsmen patrol commercial airports. Metal detection equipment and bomb sniffing dogs are common sights at professional sports events. Gates to public and military facilities that once stood open are now locked and guarded. Almost overnight, we transitioned from a nation that was enjoying a time of peace to one waging war against an enemy that knows no boundaries or rules.

Navy Medicine isn't exempt from these changes; in fact, since the first hours, it has been on the front lines. The men and women of Navy Medicine were among the first to aid the injured at the Pentagon and comfort and care for the thousands of rescue workers who worked around the clock in the desperate race to find survivors beneath the rubble that was the World Trade Center.

Navy Medicine was ready that day, and in the days and weeks that followed. And with each day I became more proud than ever to say I am Navy's Surgeon General as we continued to respond, steaming to assist in the far corners of the world -- to Camp Rhino in Afghanistan, aboard amphibious ships and combatants, with the Marines, to Bahrain and Kuwait, and to the Indian Ocean. Doctors and nurses, corpsmen and medical specialists are on the front line, a powerful force multiplier, ensuring our Sailors and Marines are physically and mentally ready for whatever challenges lie ahead.

To our south, Navy Medicine is an integral part of Joint Task Force 160 in Guantanamo Bay. Last week, containers of tents and equipment that would become Fleet Hospital 20 were offloaded in Cuba, and its staff from Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune and several other MTFs worked with the Seabees to "build" the hospital in a day. With them is a SPRINT team from Naval Medical Center Portsmouth, and a detachment from Naval Environmental Preventative Medicine Unit TWO in Norfolk. These and other professionals are seeing to it that not only are the Taliban and Al Qaeda detainees properly cared for, but that our own forces are receiving the best medical services possible.

Closer to home, Navy Medicine's newly established Office of Homeland Security is doing its part to ensure the highest level of security at home and is testing one of its first products, the Institutional Vulnerability Assessment Process (IVAP), which helps identify areas where our people and facilities may be vulnerable. It will help ensure our facilities are prepared for any threat that may arise. Navy MTFs will all see the IVAP in the next 12 to 18 months.

A Navy Medicine Integrated Product Team worked long and hard to develop three Commander's guidebooks intended to provide information, to stimulate thought, and provide a format for response to chemical, biological and radiological/nuclear terrorism. The first of these guides, Commander's Guidebook: MTF Preparedness and Response to Biological Terrorism, has already been distributed and is available for download on the BUMED

homepage, <https://bumed.med.navy.mil/med02/bio%20guide%208%20final.doc>. The others will be distributed soon.

New health threats continue to emerge across the globe. Navy medical researchers are working hard for solutions to help counter the effects of biological weapons and naturally occurring infectious diseases. At this very moment, our scientists are developing an agile DNA vaccine technology that will revolutionize the way we protect against deadly threats like anthrax, malaria and scrub typhus. Many others are also out in the field gathering valuable information in an effort to overcome potential health threats. The future possibilities of this work will have a truly global impact.

Navy Medicine is making its mark in many areas. Although our operational efforts to provide force health protection are always a priority, other far reaching support continues to make a huge difference. Navy Medicine personnel are volunteering at low-income clinics in their communities. Reservists are coordinating an effort to provide free medical and dental care to in-need residents in the Southwest. Navy flight surgeons recently traveled over 600 miles to evacuate and treat an Indonesian fisherman who sustained a serious eye injury on board a Japanese fishing vessel. Challenges large and small are consistently being met by our people.

Earlier this week, President Bush spoke of the State of the Union. He said, our nation has never been stronger, despite the fact we are at war and facing unprecedented dangers. He also reminded us that this is just the opening salvo, the beginning of a war we can expect to be long and arduous.

Amidst all of these changes in our lives, you have stepped up, eager to face the challenge. You have continued to demonstrate the excellence and spirit that epitomize Navy Medicine in its mission of Force Health Protection.

I know that Navy Medicine is up to anything that this war on terrorism may bring. I commend to you that the state of Navy Medicine has never been stronger. We have responded unhesitatingly in the past, and are steaming to assist those who need us most, today and in the future. It is our mission and our tradition. I am very proud of you.

- VADM Michael L. Cowan, MC, Surgeon General of the Navy